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ABSTRACT

Based upon the belief that what children learn from adult responses to their early behavior sets the foundations on which they will build all future learning, this publication provides information for teachers on the appropriate guidance and management of children's behavior in early childhood settings using a contextual approach. Issues discussed in the document include: (1) setting a behavior policy for the institution; (2) building positive relationships with children; (3) using a knowledge of child development to create appropriate expectations for behavior; (4) considering developmental issues in responding to children's behavior; (5) understanding the impact of changes and loss on children's behavior; (6) examining the variety of family lifestyle issues, such as family routines, living situations, and family tensions; (7) identifying the effects of sociocultural backgrounds on children's behavior, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island children; (8) understanding the personal characteristics of each child; (9) realizing the impact of various chronic or acute illness on children's behavior; (10) dealing with children's aggression; (11) creating behavior-friendly classroom environments; (12) developing a plan when behavior problems arise; (13) working with parents; (14) responding to particular behavior problems, such as out of control feelings, emotional stress, regression, and separation anxiety; (15) talking to a child when there is a problem; and (16) using a checklist to identify and evaluate possible strategies for guiding children's behavior. A list of resources concludes the publication. (KDFB)

BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT

in context

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4

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Reference Group:

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Pam Linke
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FOREWORD

Appropriate guidance and management of children's behaviour is more than just an adjunct to education; it is an integral part of providing optimal conditions for the child to learn and develop. It is also more than responding to what is happening at any given time but providing an appropriate setting for, and responding to, the expression of the children's feelings, needs, training and abilities. *Behaviour Management in context* addresses behaviour in the broadest sense and, in doing so, offers teachers and carers tools to make a valuable contribution to the development of the children in their care. Evidence from research—that what happens in the early years has a major impact on the child's future—makes it imperative that teachers and carers try to help children to come to terms with their world and to meet it in ways that will enhance their chances for success in all aspects of their lives. *Behaviour Management in context* offers not only background information in understanding the issues, but practical suggestions and guidelines. It assists in creating a facilitating environment, and for addressing issues and problems as they arise in early childhood settings from birth to the early school years.

Pam Linke

NOTES

For convenience, the pronouns *he* and *she* have been alternated. Both *he* and *she* signify either a boy or a girl.

Touch: In this book there are times when it is suggested that it is important to touch a child in some way. I believe that touch is fundamental to children's healthy development but the kind of touch is equally important. For example, to some cultures and to some children a pat on the head is not appropriate. It goes without saying that sexual touching is inappropriate. For older children holding or restraining, while necessary in situations of danger, may at other times not always be considered appropriate. Holding children who are out of control should be discussed with parents in advance and the reasons why it is important explained.

Teachers and early childhood workers need to consider what is appropriate for children in their own working context.

It is a sad indictment on our society if some children don't get the touching they need because of adult prejudice, fears, or lack of understanding.

Behaviour management: Although in this book the term 'behaviour management' is used consistently, as it is the term which is currently used in early childhood settings, I have some difficulties with it as a concept relating to young children. Behaviour management implies a behavioural approach in which, if the behaviour is managed, problems will be solved. (Schools and centres may not see behaviour management in this way but the terminology has the potential to be misleading.) I would prefer a term such as 'response to children's behaviour' as I believe that behaviour is an important communication of the child's needs and feelings. Behaviour requires a broad response which will in the first instance keep children safe and will gradually teach them to communicate needs verbally, to learn the skills to relate socially with others, to solve their own problems, and to ask for help when needed. It requires a response which sees behaviour as a form of communication linked to the child's developmental, physical, social, and emotional state.

Pam Linke

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements iv

Foreword v

Notes vi

Introduction 1

Behaviour Policy 2

Relationships first 6

The development context 7

Considering developmental issues in responding to behaviour 10

Change and loss 12

Family lifestyle 14

Socio-cultural effects on children's behaviour 16

Issues within the child 19

Health 21

Aggression 24

Issues to do with setting behaviour-friendly environments 26

When problems arise 29

Working with parents 33

Some suggested responses to particular behaviour problem issues 35

Talking to children when there is a problem 38

Final checklist 39

References 40

Further reading 40

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1
INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is a time of momentous importance in the lives of children. It is a time when they learn, amongst many other things, who they are as young people, how to relate to others, and how to manage emotions. This early learning sets the foundations on which they will build for the rest of their lives.

How their behaviour is responded to by those who care for them results in learning that is as important, if not more important, than anything else they will learn. Behaviour expresses who they are, how they feel and what they need. Caring and sensitive responses to behaviour will help the child to grow, feel confident and worthwhile, able to manage feelings and relate socially to others, able to learn and make the most of opportunities.

This book is about looking at behaviour in context and some ways to develop responses taking the context into account. It is important that behaviour management takes these issues into account, both in thinking about their meaning for the child and in the planning of appropriate responses. There is not just one cause or response to school refusal or fighting or inattentiveness or biting. Each child and set of circumstances need to be considered individually in their own unique context. Without this approach we fail to do justice to the child.

Contextual issues may be to do with what is happening within the child, in the child's life outside school, centre or preschool setting; or they may be issues to do with the setting itself.

Effects of school on the development of children

> '*Schools have a more powerful effect than children's backgrounds on:*
>
> - *their educational progress and hence their later job prospects*
> - *their behaviour in school and on truancy*
> - *their subsequent delinquency rates.*'
>
> Sula Wolff[1]
> 1994

What teachers and carers do counts! Sula Wolff's research shows that schools **do** have a major impact on children even though there are times when teachers and carers may doubt this.

Appropriate responses to children's behaviour are fundamental to their learning and healthy development and to their ability to live and work in the world. Sula Wolff's proposition[1] that the school carries more weight than the home background highlights the responsibility that teachers have to ensure that children in their care have the best possible opportunity for positive development. This opportunity should not be impeded by inappropriate responses to difficult behaviours.

Sula Wolff's remarks would apply equally to children spending a considerable amount of time in preschool or child care settings.

[1] Sula Wolff is Honorary Fellow of the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Edinburgh. She has written several books about children and is author of a recent report to the WHO on the effect of schools on children's mental health.

2
BEHAVIOUR POLICY

'Individual differences between children at any given age are so great that any class, however similar it may seem, must be treated as a collection of children needing individual and different attention.'
Department of Education and Science 1967
(The Plowden Report)

One important factor in supporting children's development is to have a school or centre behaviour management policy, supported by all staff.

All children need to know that their centre or school will be safe for them and that behaviour which affects the safety and wellbeing of themselves or others is not allowed.

Behaviour management policy must be inclusive and respect children's and families' experiences and lifestyles. The diversity of experience adds to the rich culture of school, centre, and community.

Behaviour policy is best worked out jointly with staff and parents and with input from children as they are old enough. It should take into account —

- safety
- social development needs
- the developmental stage of the children
- cultural and environmental needs
- the need for a flexible approach according to the individual child's needs.

A behaviour management policy may recommend some strategies for responding to behaviour; e.g.

- the importance of listening to the child;
- use of distraction for young children;
- allowing children to experience consequences when this is safe and desirable; e.g. if a child spills paint by 'silly' behaviour, there is no more left for her to paint with until some more can be mixed. If she accidentally knocks it over, she can help you mix up some more;
- teaching of problem-solving; e.g. '*What could we do so people don't get bumped into in the playground?*';
- teaching children to take the other's perspective; e.g. '*Joe feels cross when you take his ball because he wants to play with it*';
- creating a 'child friendly' environment;
- giving reasons for rules and consequences; e.g. '*We don't bite. Biting hurts*' or for older children, '*That pencil is Ivy's. When you want to use something that belongs to someone else you need to ask them*';
- giving choices; e.g. '*Would you like to help put away the blocks or the puzzles?*';
- involving children in developing and 'owning' rules as they are able;
- time out with an adult;
- encouragement and celebration of small steps towards achievement.

It should also be flexible enough to allow for individual needs and situations within the general guidelines; e.g. a rigid behaviour policy might say that when children are disruptive they go into time out. A more flexible policy might say that generally, if a child of school age is disruptive, time out will be used but that for a child who has special needs (e.g. separation problems) another response will be found.

It is of limited use to have a policy that takes context into account but then applies the set solution!

Children who are suffering from emotional stress may not respond to the usual behaviour management strategies, no matter how constructive.

In terms of educational theory very few teachers would expect the same methods and responses to apply to every child no matter what the child's personal attributes, developmental readiness, or environmental influences. Within a general understanding of

learning and developmental theory, optimal education and optimal behaviour management demand that the individual child's needs be recognised.

Learning about how to behave and to manage one's emotions is a part of the overall learning process and requires the same understanding and response as for all other teaching and learning. In fact, without appropriate responses and teaching about behaviour, all of a child's learning will be impeded. A child who is angry, sad, antagonistic, fearful, or inattentive is not able to make the most of his learning opportunities. This is not to say that there should not be rules for safety and social learning (e.g. not hitting and taking turns), but it is to say that the **response to breaking these rules should relate to the needs and experience of the individual child.**

N.B. It is helpful for all parents to have a copy and understanding of the behaviour policy and its rationale, so they will appreciate in advance that each child's individual behavioural needs will be responded to (as with educational needs).

Children's perceptions, teachers' dilemmas. What might be against a flexible behaviour management?

Concerns about a flexible behaviour management policy are often around being seen to be fair, the pressures of time, or the need for consistency.

It's not fair!

Learning about fairness is a part of children's development. The stage of 'It's not fair' is a stage that they can move beyond as they grow in understanding.

For many young children to be fair means to be exactly the same. They gradually learn that in terms of opportunity and justice and outcomes 'equal' does not mean 'the same'.

When children say 'It's not fair' if everyone is not treated the same, it is important for them to learn that 'equal' is not 'the same'. For various reasons different children are ready for different types of experience at different times. For example, some four-year-olds are ready to sit on a mat and listen to stories; some are not, or are distracted from other causes and will become disruptive.

In one preschool centre, Tony did not want to sit on the mat and take part in group time. The other children were told that they 'know about how to sit and listen and hear good stories and can show Tony how. He will join in when he is ready for this new learning.' Tony, who was having battles at home at this time, was surprised when no battle occurred over sitting on the mat. Before long he joined the others, and his new learning was celebrated. Forcing the issue would have been likely to produce a child who was angry and preoccupied and did not benefit from the experience. (Some parents may believe this is necessary in preparation for school. This would depend on the school. It is also important to remember that every child may not be ready to start school at the same age.)

A two-year-old who hits another child may do it because she is feeling left out and unwanted (perhaps there is a new baby at home), and a negative consequence will reinforce the feelings of being unloved. Others may need to be beginning to learn about sharing. Learning about sharing begins from infancy; expectations that a child will be able to share depend on that child's development, emotional state, and the particular context. An eight-year-old who is struggling with the emotions aroused by the birth of a new baby in the family may show her distress by becoming uncooperative at school. She needs to have her feelings acknowledged, to get support from her teacher in coping with them and to have classroom activities which involve her in a way that makes her feel special. Consequences which might be useful with another child in another situation will only make her feel worse.

One child who lashes out may need a hug because she is desperate; another might need holding; another might need some quiet time with an adult away from the group.

An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island child may not respond to a teacher's direction because he doesn't know the teacher *(see Aboriginal*

and Torres Strait Island section) and needs some relationship-building first.

In all of the above examples and many more '***the same***' response to the children's behaviour would certainly not be equal in terms of social justice and learning opportunity.

In discussion with parents about incidents affecting their children it is important to come from the point of view that what you are doing is what you believe is best for their child, and to work on this aspect with them if they are unhappy about anything (e.g. another child being treated differently). This gives the opening to discuss with the parent how parent and centre or school can best work together to help the child.

For 'fair' outcomes for children behaviour management, like any other aspect of learning, must take into account the total context of the child and the child's needs within that context.

Children benefit from learning that different people have different needs at different times and to be responsive to this. This takes time!

There isn't time amongst all the other pressures to give an individual response to children's behaviour

There are many pressures on teachers' and carers' time. Many day-to-day occurrences that fit within the general behaviour management policy can be sorted out without in-depth investigation. However, persistent or severe difficulties that interrupt a child's learning opportunities and social development need carefully considered responses.

For the carer or teacher, using a quick solution may (but does not always) seem to save time and frustration. But if we ask what it does for the child in terms of helping him to learn to manage feelings and behaviour and helping him solve his problems, the answer would be different.

For schools and centres who believe that they do not have the staff to treat children individually it is the same as with the educative process. You do the best you can with the resources you have. But how you think about it will affect what you do, no matter what the resources.

The following case is an example of a child care situation where the day-to-day solutions were unsuccessful and a contextual solution was successful. A three-year-old in long day care had regressed in her toilet habits over some months and would not do poo except in a nappy. She was also aggressive to the other children, calling herself a tiger and scratching them. Staff had tried their usual positive encouragement for toilet training and managing aggressive behaviour, but without results. A meeting was held with a consultant, all the relevant staff, and the child's mother. It was discovered that the mother was very busy and rushed in her time with the child, owing to study and work commitments, and that she had some months ago entered a new relationship of which the child seemed somewhat jealous.

At the end of the meeting it was agreed that the mother would reorganise her mornings so they were less rushed and that the staff would take all the pressure off the toilet training, this being an area in which the child had some control of her life. Mother and staff together would write a story for the child about sometimes feeling confused and cross but also about belonging and being loved by lots of people. The story was about a little tiger.

The aggression to other children stopped almost immediately, and within a month the child had stopped asking for nappies and was using the toilet appropriately. In this situation the staff's usual responses were not successful. By looking at the wider context the parent and teachers were able to implement a successful response. While it took more time initially to put into practice it saved time in the long run and enabled the child to manage her difficulties and get on with the business of living and learning.

Consistency

Many people believe that consistency is more important than responding to children's individual needs. In general children need the security of knowing what the limits are and what to expect from teachers and carers. They also need to learn that expectations of them change as they grow older and more capable.

Children will learn too that, in spite of the best of intentions, the people who care for them will not always react in the same way to what they do. Within reasonable limits they can adjust to this as they grow older, especially if explanations and/or apologies are given when appropriate: e.g. '*I am sorry I did not listen to you just now, but I had to …*' or '*Tim isn't able to be with the group today, he is feeling sad and he needs some time by himself.*'

Consistency is not to the advantage of a child if it is clearly not helping this particular child in his special circumstances. Children should, however, be able to expect that staff will be consistent as far as they are able in:

- treating them as unique individuals;
- listening to individual problems and needs;
- responding in a way that is respectful of their needs and the needs of others;
- providing a safe environment;
- providing reliable explanations about what is expected of children.

3
RELATIONSHIPS FIRST

'When children are treated with acceptance, they develop self-acceptance and when they are cherished, they conclude that they deserve to be loved and they develop self-esteem.'
Stephanie Marsden

Behaviour occurs and must be responded to within relationships. Young children usually do what is asked of them because they want to please the person who asks them. Sometimes they do what is not wanted because they don't know how else to handle their anger, frustration, confusion, or other negative feelings which can sometimes be misinterpreted as rebellion.

Even very young children will hit a carer if they are frustrated or angry, because they have developed little control yet over expression of feelings. If they are feeling hurt or angry they will often do the opposite of what they think is wanted. Children of any age who feel rejected or unwanted may misbehave in order to get attention.

For behaviour management to be successful, it must occur within a positive relationship.

While it is recognised that this positive relationship between carer and child is crucial to the child's learning adaptable behaviour, the strategies necessary to build this relationship can sometimes be overlooked.

Strategies for building relationships with children

- Help every child to feel valued and wanted and respected: e.g. notice when she arrives and leaves. Say things like 'I'm glad you're in my group/class' and 'I missed you when you were away yesterday'.
- Ensure special attention for each child and really listen to their concerns. This does not necessarily mean a lot of time, but needs to be done regularly. It can be as small as a touch or smile or wink in passing.
- Notice what the children do and respond to them as individual people. This means choosing them sometimes to do something with you: e.g. 'I would like you to help me with this'; 'Come for a walk with me to post a letter'; 'Would you like to help me choose some flowers for the office?'.
- Say something personal about the child when parents come and ask you how their child is doing. The parents will appreciate the fact that you have noticed their child specially. Just to say 'Fine' says to the parents that you haven't really noticed their child at all. Instead say, for example, 'Peter had a lot of fun with water today and he invented a new way of mixing colours in the paint'; or 'Peter has been very helpful in the classroom today and shared his pencils with Sally'.
- Smile when you meet children; for example, greeting a child as you walk across the school yard or play area. They are very sensitive to adults' facial expressions, and what to the adult is just a preoccupied expression, may seem to a child like lack of interest or annoyance. A smile or a frown takes on a lot of meaning when it comes from someone who is powerful and important in your life.
- Do the sort of things you do when you want to build friendships with other adults; e.g. talk with them, share with them, listen to them, take an interest in their interests, set aside time for them.

If you are having behaviour management problems with a child, it is most important to go back to the relationship first and work from there. If you feel unable to care about a particular child, it needs to be discussed with a supervisor or peer. Occasionally a child behaves in such a way or looks like someone that triggers negative associations from the past and prevents the development of a genuine relationship. Everyone has some of these associations. **Responsible caring and teaching involves learning about ourselves as much as about children, and this is an opportunity to learn.**

4
THE DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

'I will base my work on the best theoretical and practical knowledge about early childhood as well as on particular knowledge of each child's development.'
AECA Code of Ethics.

An understanding of child development forms the basis of early childhood programs. Although some of the early tenets about child development are currently being debated, it is important to go back to it in looking at children's behaviour and responding to it. A knowledge of child development gives a general understanding of appropriate expectations within which the variation of individual children must be taken into account. Development levels are a guide to be used within the context of an individual child's needs and situation. For example, a child under stress may need to regress and to be nurtured as a younger child for a time. On the other hand, children working with an adult may be able to achieve success beyond their developmental levels. As with educational tasks, learning about feelings and behaviour is a complex process in which the teacher/carer's involvement is fundamental in supporting the child's achievement. It is important to remember that children need to feel successful most of the time. The following is a brief overview of developmental issues, particularly relevant to behaviour.

Infancy (0–6 months)

The concept of behaviour management in this age group is irrelevant because the infant has no concept of cause and effect or even of herself as a separate individual. The caregiver's role is not to manage behaviour but to recognise and respond to needs. **Children of this age cannot misbehave**. Babies learn that the world is safe by having their needs for food, security, and comfort met as fully as possible. They don't have a concept of themselves as separate from their carers or a conscious understanding that if they cry they can make someone come. **When they cry they are responding to inner discomfort of some kind, and it is as the carers learn to know each particular baby that they will learn what is going on for that baby and what will bring comfort.** The baby at the same time is learning that his needs will be responded to and that the world is a safe and reliable place.

For this reason it is advisable not to have too many changes of carer in infancy, as different carers respond differently in subtle if not major ways. This can inhibit the baby's learning about the world; and make him more difficult to settle into a routine and take longer to learn to trust his world.

Toddlerhood (6 months to 3 years)

By around six months the child starts to learn that she is separate from other objects and people and that they exist even when she can't see them. It is a time when the child becomes attached to a particular carer or carers and often afraid or insecure when that person (or persons) is not available to her. This is a natural reaction and a self-protective one. The world can seem very scary to an infant or toddler. The only way that very young children can protect themselves against the dangers of the world is to be near the person they feel safe with. As the child feels more secure, she will be able to explore further and further away from her safe base.

Children can and do form attachments with more than one person, and these attachments do not undermine each other. In fact they give the child other models to call on in time of stress. The attachment a child may develop with a particular caregiver is important to her development. In some cases attachment to a

teacher or carer has helped a child to overcome problems related to insecure home circumstances.[2] Enforced or ill-planned separation from attachment persons during this period can give rise to emotional stress, and fear of abandonment, particularly in temperamentally sensitive or vulnerable children. The beginning of the child care day and bedtimes are times when children are likely to be affected by these fears.

At this stage also the child may develop an attachment to a particular object (e.g. a dummy) which serves as a sort of a bridge between the security of infancy and the world of being a truly separate individual. These attachment objects are very important at times of separation or stress, and usually serve this purpose until the child is three or four and has developed a sense of his own internal security. The child will gradually cease using the comforter as its meaning for him becomes less important.

The major emotional task for children during this period is the gradual development of a sense of separate individual identity. In order to develop this sense of being a secure, separate person, the child first needs a secure attachment to his primary caregivers. Understanding that you are separate develops over the early years. The six-month-old realises that objects exist when they are out of sight when he delightedly pulls his robe in front of his face and plays hide-and-seek behind it, or cheerfully drops his spoon over the edge of his high chair and waits for it to be returned. The one-year-old is still not certain that all his body belongs to him, and may try to pull a rope that he is standing on the end of because he doesn't realise that the feet on the end of the rope are in his control. He believes that his thoughts, too, are not separate and that if he is feeling angry or sad others will be feeling the same way.

He learns about who he is in very concrete ways—from how he looks and what he can do and what he owns. Under-threes find it very difficult to share, because they have not yet learned the concept of owning.

Toddler learning is very physical and involves trying things and touching things, holding on and letting go (throwing). Toddlers are interested in their own bodies and the bodies of other children. A toddler can be very frightened by broken bodies or missing body parts because he has not yet learned that his body is whole and permanent.

They have no concept of death and, because they think magically cannot understand that something has died and will not come back. For example, one pre-schooler said, '*I know Daddy is dead, but will he be back for my birthday?*'

They have a strong developmental need to assert their individuality by saying *no*, even when they want something, and by touching and exploring and testing limits. Because they have not yet learned to reason, they cannot be safely taught not to do something when there is no supervision. A two-year-old who is struggling with this learning can be seen heading towards an electric plug that she has been told not to touch, saying 'No, no, no' to herself as she pulls it out of the wall. Children at this age are still driven by their emotions and are not amenable to reason. It is the beginning of learning to manage feelings constructively—a very long process.

Many people, including writers, interpret this stage of learning as oppositional rather than developmental and hence set the scene for battles of will with the child, rather than learning opportunities.

One-to-three-year-olds may have many fears, owing to their lack of understanding of the world. These can vary, for example:

- fear of abandonment;
- fear of going down the toilet bowl when it is flushed;
- fear of dogs;
- fear of strangers, clowns, or masks that can seem like broken faces.

Many children deal with these fears by clinging to routine and wanting things done in the same way every time. Some children find it very difficult to make choices, others are very rigid about what they will eat or wear. It is the child's way to attempt to keep some of their world stable while dealing with the many exciting and scary new developments in their lives.

Pre schoolers (3-5-years)

By three to four years of age children have usually developed enough inner security to manage separations and sharing and taking turns, and are able to play socially with one another for reasonable periods. They will have learned that their minds are separate and they experiment with this by making up stories; e.g. '*The big bad wolf did it*'.

They know what gender they are but do not yet understand that this is permanent. They are likely, however, to already have developed attitudes towards race and gender which will cause many issues (e.g. prejudice) with which teachers and carers have to deal.

By four the child is often much more confident, adventurous, noisy and boisterous. Four-year-olds usually love to experiment with words, and toilet and swear words may be a great source of fun.

Four-year-olds are beginning to be able to understand reason and to manage their feelings.

School Beginners (5–8 years)

Beginning school brings major challenges to the child's equilibrium. There is a new setting, new demands, and a very big step into the values and larger world of the school yard and classroom. Children start to compare themselves with others in more meaningful ways, and to be more concerned about social relationships and academic achievement. Expectations of them are often much greater at home as well as at school. Many children become stressed and unsettled for a period when they begin school.

During the early school years children are developing their own sense of right and wrong. At six they will not yet have a good understanding of what truth and honesty mean. Many six-year-olds take small things from their peers. Most will try to please the parent or carer and, if they think that person will not be pleased with what they have done, they will tell a lie. By the time they are eight or so and have learned about the tooth fairy and Father Christmas, they will have made big strides in understanding the difference between truth and fantasy and what is theirs and not theirs.

If a six-year-old has done something such as taking another child's belongings, she is likely to lie if asked whether she did it, because her understanding of the importance of truth is less than her need to please the teacher. Therefore, saying 'Before we go out to lunch I want the person who took the ruler to own up...' is likely to stress the child and cause her to lie. If you know who did it, it is better to tell her so and use it as a teaching opportunity. 'I would like you to give Sam his ruler back because he needs it. The ruler belongs to Sam and, if you would like to borrow it, you can ask him.'

Children at the upper end of this age range will be able to reason in a more mature way than younger children and will be able to see cause and effect and use problem-solving techniques more effectively. Much younger children can, of course, be starting to learn to make appropriate choices which lead into problem-solving behaviour.

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CONSIDERING DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES IN RESPONDING TO BEHAVIOUR

Three questions a carer/teacher needs to ask:

1. 'Is it normal behaviour for this age under these circumstances?'
2. 'Are my expectations of this child appropriate for a child of this age?'
3. 'Is my response to the behaviour appropriate for a child of this age?'

1. 'Is it normal behaviour for this age under these circumstances?'

For example, aggression in a group of two-year-olds who are expected to play together and share toys. If it is normal, then trying to change the circumstances so that undue pressure is not placed on the child will be of more help than trying to change the child. In the above example one might think about more separation in play space and time, extra adult supervision, shorter group play periods and, if appropriate, more duplicated toys. Giving a child a corner to play where she is not continually being subjected to intrusions and demands from other toddlers, or giving children different times to play with popular equipment, are ways of taking the stress from beginners in the world of sharing and socialising. At the same time the carer would be talking about what sharing means so that the child is learning about it, but without the expectation that she will be able to achieve it yet.

Some examples of what would be considered normal behaviour for age include:

Two-year-old :

- defending her own territory (e.g. refusing to share, by hitting or biting);
- being unable to control her impulses to do something forbidden;
- saying 'no' to assert her individuality even while wanting to do what is suggested;
- touching forbidden objects because touch is still very important to learning;
- being very rigid about what she will eat;
- becoming distressed when separated from the persons she depends on;
- clinging to a dummy or other comforter;
- throwing things.

Four-year-old:

- being 'bossy' and wanting to control;
- over-the-top excitement;
- making up stories (he is only beginning to learn what is true and what is make-believe);
- swearing or using toilet or sex words.

Six-to-seven-year-old:

- irritability towards the end of the day;
- occasional stealing;
- occasional cheating;
- occasional lying;
- being a bad loser.

All these are part of normal development and an occasion for teaching, not 'behaviour management'.

If a child's behaviour seems outside the range of what you would expect for her age and the circumstances then other contextual influences need to be considered. It is usually better to treat children at the age they are acting at and to move forward gradually than to try to push them to act their chronological age; e.g. many three-year-olds are ready to share group times, some are not.

2. 'Are my expectations of this child appropriate for a child of this age?'

For example, is a four-year-old being expected to be completely truthful and not make up stories? Is an 18-month-old expected to be able to remember and obey what he must not do, in the absence of adult supervision? If so, then consideration needs to be given to altering the expectations so that the child is able to achieve success.

Often a child at the begining of his school years is expected to understand reasons beyond his ability to do so. For example, a child who is told to pack up what he is doing cannot be expected to understand the exigencies of the timetable. He will respond better to an understanding of his feelings—'*You wish you to could play longer*'—and a simple direction: '*It's story-writing time now. I'll help you to pack up.*'

3. 'Is my response to the behaviour appropriate for a child of this age?'

For example, it is not usually appropriate to use time-out for children under three. Time-out is a response which requires the child to hold in her mind what she has done wrong and to think about what she could do differently. It is also used to stop the social reinforcement of the behaviour. Even if it is explained to the child, it is difficult for a two-year-old to understand this, and she is likely to see it as a punishment without learning from it. She is not likely to be able to remember the next time she is under pressure. Time-out with an adult, or removing the child to a different situation, can relieve the pressure at the moment.

One father told of being slightly taken aback to find his two-year-old looking woebegone in time-out in a cot for biting. When asked if he felt it helped his daughter to learn not to bite, he said they realised that the child had other pressures on her at the time and, when these were relieved, the biting stopped.

For similar reasons consequences are of limited use with toddlers. For example, '*You did not pick up the toys so now there will be no time for a story*' will have little teaching effect for most under-threes. Simple cause-and-effect consequences are more effective: e.g. '*The water spilled because the glass was too full. Let's get a rag and I'll help you wipe it up. Then you can try pouring again.*'

Under-threes are still very vulnerable to separation, and using separation as a behavioural technique can be very frightening for young children, as can threatening to leave them behind if they don't want to come. There is also the danger that the child may be learning that separation is the way to deal with difficulties. This is not to say that a young child should not be removed from a situation that she cannot handle, but rather that this will be more effective if she stays with an adult or goes to another, easier situation.

Because young children learn concretely through seeing and doing and trying things, it is more useful to teach them what you want them to do than to punish them for what is not wanted. For example, '*Let's put the block gently on the table*' rather than '*Don't throw the blocks*'. This adds a new skill to their repertoire and enhances self-esteem.

A six-year-old who tells a lie when asked if he took another child's rubber or pocket money is most likely to deny it because he has not yet grasped the concept of truth and his desire to please the teacher is more important to him. This is an opportunity to teach him about ownership and asking for what he wants to borrow. It is wiser not to ask children of this age to 'own up', as they are most likely to deny what they did and compound their difficulties.

Expecting six-or-seven-year-olds to play competitive games and lose without cheating or sulking is also unrealistic. They need lots of experience of winning and learning impulse control before they can achieve this.

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6
CHANGE AND LOSS

Change

Perhaps the most common issues affecting children's behaviour are those of change and loss. Their effect on children is easily overlooked. Change and loss are part of living, and it is not possible to protect children from them. By sensitive handling of the small changes of childhood we can lay strong foundations for the bigger changes they will meet later in life.

Changes which affect children can range from changing from a cot to a bed, to a parent returning to work, changing schools, or losing a parent through death or divorce. Different things are important when seen through a child's eyes and the child's understanding of time is very different. What seems a short time to an adult can seem never-ending to a young child. **What seems small to an adult may loom large and terrifying to a child.**

Some changes are short-term, such as a parent's absence because of work or illness; some are continuing, as with the arrival of a new baby. Some require continual readjustment as changes continue to occur, as with divorce when access and other arrangements may require children to keep readjusting to new changes, both in place of living and also in the people who parent them.

Common changes to be aware of include:

The arrival or impending arrival of a new baby. Research has shown that this is one of the most significant and stressful events in a child's life[1]. It involves not only change but the loss of parental time and loss of positive interaction. Sometimes it also involves the loss of the child's cot or bed or room. Children as young as 18 months may react to this change months before the baby is born, when it actually arrives, or later when the younger child starts to intrude on the life of the older one. Children as old as adolescence may react equally strongly to this situation.

The change from home to out-of-home care, or the loss of a teacher or carer to whom the child is attached. This does not mean that you should try to avoid or prevent attachments (unless you know that the teacher or carer is going to leave in the near future). These attachments provide the basis for learning and growing emotionally, so the losses they may incur need to be dealt with rather than avoided.

- The loss of a loved comforter or dummy which has been mislaid or prematurely taken away from the child.
- The loss of a loved toy or pet.
- The loss of security with beginning school, preschool, or care.
- Loss of parental time owing to pressures at home or a parent starting work.
- Sickness of a parent or the child or a sibling.
- Absence of grandparents.
- A parent spending long periods working away from home.
- Parents becoming less emotionally available to the child because of stress, depression, or anxiety.
- Moving house owing to relationship breakups.
- Loss of neighbours, special spots in the garden or house when moving house.
- Changing schools. This necessitates making new friends and adjusting to new expectations.

Children's response to loss

Children's response to loss varies according to their own personality, how they perceive the loss, and the support available to them. If the grief affects the whole family, the necessary emotional support may not be available to the child.

- At first there may be shock or seeming non-response.
- The child may become forgetful or clumsy.
- With some children there is obvious and severe distress.
- Others withdraw into themselves — often mistaken as good adjustment.
- Some become hypervigilant (seeming hyperactive) — ever on guard against something else going wrong.
- Some regress to younger behaviour (e.g. whining, clinging, soiling, wetting, wanting to be dressed, thumb-sucking.)
- Some develop a stammer or a tic (repetitive movement).
- Anxiety affects concentration, and children may be unable to settle even to small tasks.
- Some children become angry and aggressive as they struggle to deal with their inner turmoil and have no resources left to deal with the demands of others, or they act out their angry feelings on anyone who is near.

Children move in and out of grief. Doing normal things some of the time helps them to defend against having to experience the overwhelming pain of grief all at once. One day they will seem to play happily and be 'over it'. The next the problems will recur. Children who are grieving or afraid cannot keep their attention on any task. Their bodies are there but their thoughts are not.

7
FAMILY LIFESTYLE

'I will encourage families to share their knowledge of the child with me and I will share my general knowledge of children with them so that there is mutual growth and understanding in ways that will benefit the child.'
AECA Code of Ethics

Not only does family lifestyle contribute to behaviour but, if it is very different from what happens at the school or centre, the child will feel disoriented and confused because of what he expects to happen. It is important that children know clearly the 'hidden' rules and expectations. For example, an expectation to say 'please and thankyou' or to 'ask before helping yourself' may be unfamiliar to some children and yet not be explained, as it is taken for granted that they will know.

Lifestyle issues can include:

Family discipline style

It is well established that a coercive discipline style is a major antecedent of aggressive children and juvenile delinquency.[4] This is a style where winning is important to the parent or carer and punishment is consistently used to enforce discipline—rather than explanation, choices, and other more positive discipline methods. The child from this kind of home setting is likely to come to school or centre looking for a battle and expecting rules to be enforced with physical punishment or coercive methods. Children may bully other children and need time spent on learning to understand feelings and other ways to negotiate. On the other hand, some children come from homes where parents rarely exert authority, and these children may find it difficult to conform to the demands of the school or centre.

Family routines

Some families have very inflexible routines which provide structure for children but little opportunity for them to explore their own limits and to practise coping with the unexpected. In other families children have no regular meals or bedtimes or expectations, and may come to school or care tired and even hungry. Breakfast and morning routines may be rushed and uncomfortable, so the child arrives unhappy and unsettled.

There is no one right way to do things. Different routines (in moderation) may work well in one setting but be confusing for the child in another.

Television

Long periods of watching television or watching fast-moving cartoons in the mornings may disturb children and make it hard for them to settle[5]. Watching videos where the content of sex or violence is inappropriate for children can also have a negative effect on their behaviour.

Responsibilities

Some children have a lot of family responsibility at a young age, such as caring for younger children. Too much responsibility can affect their behaviour. It can result in an eldest child, perhaps a girl, feeling that she always needs to be compliant to be accepted, and it can prevent her from expressing her own needs. It can make children tired and unable to concentrate. If the child has to take a semi-adult role in the family, it can affect her capacity to be a child and have fun.

Position in the family

Apart from responsibilities expected of the older child, other family positions can affect children's self-concept and behaviour.

- Middle children traditionally can feel that they don't have a special place in the family or in their parents' affections.
- Only children are often generous and outgoing because sharing has not been forced on them at a very young age, but they may sometimes be inexperienced and inept at the social give-and-take of childhood.
- Only children and the children of single parents are sometimes used to having more

'say' at home than may be appropriate for school or centre, and find it difficult to accept authority.

Family living situations

Sometimes families live in conditions that are crowded, or share with relatives or grandparents. This may be very supportive, or it may put a great deal of pressure on children as they struggle with different sets of values in the same house.

If children have to move from house to house because of parental separation it may be difficult for them to keep track of belongings and friendships. If handover times are not prepared for and handled well, children can suffer from stress on the days before and after the change. Sometimes children are subjected to conflict between separated parents at handover times.

Some children live in flats or neighbourhoods that are not child-focused, and are unused to the give-and-take of play with children.

In some families there is a variety of people moving in and out, and this may be linked with a lack of parental supervision.

A child who belongs to a family which frequently moves from place to place can be unsettled.

Some children live in multiple-care situations which can be confusing for them; e.g. their week may be divided between parental care, two different grandparents, preschool and centre-based care or after-school care.

Children can learn to live with different standards as long as the expectations are clear and there is not conflict between different carers; e.g. the implication from school or centre that what happens at home is inadequate.

Family tension

Parental tension is very stressful for children, and they often carry unspoken and unanswered fears about their own security when there is a lot of tension between the parents. Often the child feels miserable without even knowing why himself, let alone being able to tell why. Children may also feel that they are somehow the cause of the trouble—especially young children who tend to see the world from their own viewpoint. This is even more understandable when we consider that many parents' quarrels are about the children, even when things are going well. When one parent leaves home, children are often afraid of losing the other parent as well. Children in these situations sometimes behave in a way that will draw the focus of parental anger onto themselves.

Parental supervision and parent attention

One of the most important things that parents can give children is time, and research has shown that parental supervision is an important factor in preventing serious and ongoing behaviour problems.[4] If parents are not available to their children, and do not know where they are or what they are doing, it can lead both to children being unused to having expectations of their behaviour and to attention-needing behaviour. Often a child in this situation will get a response of 'That's just attention seeking', and the behaviour and the child will be ignored. **These children need attention and they need to learn how to ask for it. Children who ask for attention inappropriately are frequently missing it at other times.**

Domestic violence (spouse or partner abuse)

This is also referred to as violence against women and children. In the majority of cases where there is domestic violence there are adverse effects on the children's emotional states and behaviour.[6] Many professionals consider it a form of child abuse. In addition to the direct effect on the child there is the added effect of the modelling of the use of violence to solve problems.

Child abuse or neglect

This has negative effects on children's behaviour, and emotional abuse which is less likely to be noticed and reported can have very damaging consequences. Emotional deprivation can mean that the child lacks even rudimentary social skills and consequently becomes a behaviour problem. In one example, when a child care worker visited at home to understand more about the child's difficulties in the care setting, a parent told the child in front of the worker to 'Go and piss in the corner'. It was very difficult for this child to conform to the expectations of the child care centre, but the visit enabled the child care worker to understand the child's difficulties.

It is important to be familiar with local regulations regarding the reporting of child abuse.

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8
SOCIO-CULTURAL EFFECTS ON CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOUR

'I will recognise that young children are vulnerable and use my influence and power in their best interests.'
AECA Code of Ethics

Socio-cultural factors can affect the child directly or through their effect on the parents or caregivers.

Societal Attitude

There are some significant non-child-friendly attitudes in our society, including a tendency to be punitive in our approach to discipline of children. Children often come from situations where their needs are not taken into account because of societal pressures; e.g.

- workplace practices and pressure on parents;
- punishment oriented child-rearing practices;
- expectations of self-reliance/self-comforting beyond children's emotional ability;
- a general philosophy of making decisions for and about children without listening to what they are trying to say either by words or behaviour, and without giving due weight to their opinions. (This does not necessarily mean acceding to their wishes).

Poverty

Poverty in itself does not necessarily affect parenting, and many children from these circumstances are well-loved and cared for.

It can, however, affect the child indirectly through the stress on the parents and also directly in many ways.[6] For example:

- Hunger or inadequate nutrition can affect concentration and behaviour.
- A child may need to carry adult responsibility and feel responsible to try to care for the parents.
- Poverty can lead to insecurity.
- A child may be left out of activities because of inability to pay.
- A child may wear different clothing from peers.
- A child may sometimes lack warm clothing.

These stresses which may make life difficult for the child can also affect the child's behaviour as he tries to compensate for what he is missing.

Competitiveness

Our children live in a society which is geared towards self-reliance, and where acquisition and personal achievement are valued highly. The personal achievement ethic can act against cooperative and caring behaviour. Reflection of this can be evident even in young children who compare belongings and who may not always be acceptable to other children and their parents as playmates. This can cause difficulties in relationships and behaviour, both for the child who teases or 'puts down' a peer and for the victim.

Gender

Expectations of children may be gender-based; e.g. in some communities aggression towards others from boys is tolerated or even approved as an acceptable male trait. Boys from this kind of environment are likely to behave aggressively and can be confused by different expectations from school or centre. On the other hand, girls who stand up for themselves may be criticised for being aggressive or bossy.

Refugee status

Children who have been through the experience of refugees may be suffering from post-traumatic stress and grief from loss of family members and familiar surroundings, and may be in a state where they disassociate or shut themselves off from painful experiences. Their parents may have had experiences which make them distrustful of any person in authority and unwilling to communicate freely.

Cultural differences

There are, of course, as many differences within cultures, including the Anglo-Australian culture, as there are between cultures. This section relates to differences which arise out of cultural traditions and mores.

These can be enriching and can also impose difficulties. They can relate to methods of discipline and to what behaviour by children is considered acceptable. It is important to find out about the cultural expectations of parents and to respect them where it is in the child's best interests to do so. In many cases this understanding can enrich the life of the school or centre. Occasionally cultural practices can be harmful to a child or put that child at odds with his peers. Practices which physically or emotionally harm children cannot be supported. Practices which are not considered harmful in one culture but may not be acceptable in Australia to other parents and children need to be handled carefully. For example, in some cultures young children are accustomed to observing the sexual intercourse of their parents, and may play out sexual acts to which other parents object and which run the risk of reports for sexual abuse. This needs to be sensitively discussed with parents.

Getting to know local cultural groups will help both to inform the centre or school and build relationships which will help in problem-solving.

Cultural differences and lack of understanding of the child's response or the child's lack of understanding of what is expected can lead to conflict and stress for child and staff.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Children

It is important not to generalise when working with Aboriginal children and families. There are huge differences between communities; differences between traditional, rural and urban communities; and differences within these groups. It is necessary to get to know the community with which you work.

However, there are some issues that may affect children's behaviour and to which teachers and carers should be alert.

- In nearly every Aboriginal group children are 'grown up' and managed by the wider family, often grandparents, not just the mother and father. This means that a range of people with differences in management may be bringing up the children, and children will be having to negotiate different expectations from an early age.
- In the home children may largely determine their own boundaries within a fairly wide latitude and settle their own conflicts. Obedience to adults may not be seen as very important. However, there are broad limits to which they are expected to conform. Children who overstep these bounds may then be punished.
- There may be conflict between what they have learned at home and what is expected of them about attitudes to authority and obedience.
- The expectations of school or centre may put children in a conflict situation, especially if the rules are not clearly spelled out. If this happens, a child may find out she is not doing the right thing only by hitting the boundaries and invoking censure. Apart from what are clearly rules there are the **subtle unspoken expectations**, e.g. *'You don't take a drink from the fridge without asking'; 'You don't sit on the teacher's chair'; 'You don't climb on tables'*, etc; depending on the individual situation.
- Amongst Aboriginal families there is an important sense of community in a very real

way. The child belongs to the community and has different responsibilities to different community members.

- Relationships are most important and children may only do things for people whom they believe are important in their lives. They may be unwilling to cooperate with a teacher with whom they don't have a relationship. 'In traditional Aboriginal culture there are very few relationships which involve someone telling someone else what to do. It is more a process of guidance and mutual learning where two people work in union and harmony.'[8]
- Aboriginal child management and limit-setting is sometimes done by teasing and threatening the child with something *'scary'* to stop them from getting hurt. Inductive discipline (explaining and reasoning) is not a common practice: e.g. *'If you go down the street by yourself the bogey man will get you'* rather than *'It is important to only go down the street with someone who is older.'* Children may take time to respond to discipline which is put in terms of positives rather than limits.

Because of these differences it is very easy to misread an Aboriginal child's behaviour. For example, one child was concerning his teacher greatly because he did not seem to be able to attend and was not doing the work that was expected of him. An Aboriginal worker was able to explain that he was afraid of making a mistake so was not doing the work.

It may be necessary to get someone to assist with understanding when an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island child has a behaviour problem. A parent or friend who comes to the centre and watches what is happening may be able to interpret it so that an appropriate response can be made. It may be necessary in the light of this to re-examine centre or school rules.

9
ISSUES WITHIN THE CHILD

'I will acknowledge the uniqueness and potential of each child.'
AECA Code of Ethics

Personal Characteristics

Each child brings to the care, preschool, or school situation her own unique personal characteristics and inherited personality traits, combined with responses and feelings which have been learned from life experiences from birth on. Children may be more or less fearful, aggressive, sociable, placid, or sensitive. They may need more or less sleep or energetic play and respond to fatigue in different ways. Fearful and highly anxious children need time and patience to help them to cope with what may seem very small changes or stresses.

Careful treatment of sensitive children is particularly important with infants. Crying and distress need a warm, caring, and consistent response so that the infant learns that the world is a safe and reliable place to be. Continual crying in infants can be very irritating but needs to be responded to, not ignored.

Some children seem to present particular difficulties in caring for and teaching them, and learning to know what will enable them to develop fully. Mary Sheedy Kurcinka, in her book *Raising Your Spirited Child*, discusses in detail ways to support and work with these children, whom she describes as 'more intense, persistent, perceptive and uncomfortable with change than other children.' This book is well worth reading for her sensitive and helpful suggestions.

'Spirited kids are like the roses in my garden. They need more attention. Throw a little water on other flowers and they grow. Not the rose, it needs special treatment. It has to be pruned and guided in its growth.

Other flowers can be plucked, pulled and mauled by a preschooler and still last for weeks on your dining room table. If you treat a rose roughly it will wilt in your hands or stab you and make you bleed.

But there is not another flower like the rose in my garden. Its rich perfume titillates my senses. Its satin soft petals tickle my fingers. Its blooms are so vibrant they stir my soul.

Spirited kids are like roses — they need special care. And sometimes you have to get past the thorns to truly enjoy their beauty.'
Mary Sheedy Kurcinka

Special Children

Some children are labelled as special because they are gifted or because they have a disability. Response of parents and others to these children may have an effect on their behaviour. Expectations may be too low, or too high or because any behaviour problem is thought to be caused by the 'specialness' rather than looking wider for a cause. For example, sometimes when a gifted child has a behaviour problem it is thought to be because his environment is not stimulating enough. Generally, gifted children can make more out

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of an unstimulating or ordinary environment than less able children, and often the behaviour difficulty has other causes; e.g. they may be out of step with their peers because they are interested in different games. Sometimes a gifted child will have problems owing to inappropriate expectations or treatment. Children with a disability may be teased or bullied by other children and react with aggression or withdrawal. The effects of the special problem itself may cause the child's behaviour difficulty.

Impulsive Children

Some children have difficulty in controlling their impulses. They do not seem to think before they act. This, of course, is normal for the very young who have not yet the capacity for reasoned choices. However, for some children this trait continues. Often these children find it difficult to problem-solve; e.g. to think of more than one alternative action.

As they enter preschool and school years they can be helped by 'stop and think' programs.

They need acknowledgment of small gains. It can help them if the adult talks about how she or he made a mistake in doing something and then talks through steps to get it right; e.g. '*I knocked over a glass then. I will walk to the table instead of running, then I will stop before I pick up my drink.*' The child could practise with the adult. Practice role plays may also help.

Impulsive children may need this kind of practice and role play in order to facilitate their acceptance by their peer groups.

10 HEALTH

Illness, either chronic (long-term) or acute (short-term) often affects the behaviour of children, as do neurological and learning disorders. A child may be labelled as difficult when she has a hearing or vision disorder or, is unwell. Serious illness and hospitalisation can cause severe emotional stress reaction. Drug treatment for various health problems, such as epilepsy, can lead to changes in behaviour.

The behavioural difficulties depend on the nature of the problem, the way it is being managed, and the individual child. For example, an ear infection is very painful. It is likely to interfere with sleep so that the child may be overtired. Some of the medications used 'hype' children up so that they are restless, irritable, and again find it very hard to relax into sleep.

Children with chronic illnesses, such as diabetes, are often very precious children within their families. As well as their behaviour being directly affected by their illness, they may have learned ways of maintaining their position within the family through their illness, a form of 'learned helplessness'. They can be less able to manage social difficulties than their peers. Conversely, they may appear more grown-up than others because of having to manage pain, fear, and many separations.

One child who had had repeated surgery for kidney disease continually drew very violent pictures. This was of concern to his teacher until she realised that it was a response to repeated invasive procedures and was in fact a healthy way of expressing his anger. When the child was encouraged to talk about his feelings about the hospitalisation, the angry drawings gradually ceased.

Some particular health problems to be aware of include:

Chronic low-grade infections

Sometimes young children have an ongoing infection such as a sinus infection which does not have obvious symptoms but makes the child feel generally unwell and irritable.

Asthma

- Children with asthma often have disturbed sleep and may be tired or inattentive.
- Being short of breath is scary for the child and the family. All of them may be very anxious to avoid anything which could bring on another attack, including exercise and environments that may be smoky or otherwise polluted. For example, going to play at a friend's house where the father smokes or someone has a cold.
- During an attack many children are irritable, due directly to the 'allergic' illness.
- They may miss a lot of school which has an effect on their ability to keep up and concentrate and also on friendships. Because of environmental hazards such as smoke there are many places where they cannot go, and this limits their friendship opportunities and may affect their feelings and behaviour.
- The medications used can also 'speed' up a child and make her irritable and less able to concentrate.
- If she also has eczema, the discomfort can add to irritability.

Diabetes

- Changes in behaviour may be one sign of swings in body sugar which need attention; e.g. losing concentration and irritability may signal a 'hypo' when food which raises blood sugar is needed urgently. ('Hypo' is low blood sugar, causing inattentiveness, faintness, and giddiness; and may lead to

loss of consciousness and even brain damage if not treated).

- Children with diabetes need absolute predictability in meal times to fit with insulin doses and cannot wait to fit in with classroom activities. This can add to the children feeling different.

Visual problems

- From about four years onwards, many children develop problems with seeing clearly up close. This can interfere with learning to read and write, especially when the print in their books becomes smaller (about Year 2). Also, children can be short-sighted and have difficulty seeing the blackboard, and with ball skills.
- These children do not know that they should be able to see clearly; all they know is that they cannot do something which other children can do, and they tend to believe that it is their fault.
- They may do many things to avoid reading, such as being disruptive, not staying on task, or developing headaches.
- Any child who is having problems with reading or writing should have a near vision assessment as part of the assessment process.

Hearing problems

- Acute ear infections can cause hearing problems which can persist for many weeks after the pain has ceased.
- Chronic ear infections (glue ear) may not be associated with an obvious acute infection, but may interfere with hearing for many months, sometimes intermittently. Adults are usually aware of acute ear infections because behaviour changes markedly, but a chronic infection which interferes with hearing may not be so obvious.
- Children in pain are likely to be irritable and easily distressed.
- If the main problem is not being able to hear, the only sign may be an apparent behaviour problem, such as not doing as they are told, not listening, not paying attention, being disruptive, and missing out on instructions.

Neurological problems

Seizure disorders such as *'grand mal'* epilepsy or *'petit mal'* epilepsy can cause behaviour difficulties in several ways.

Before these disorders are diagnosed, inattentiveness, sudden mood swings, 'absences', or excessive 'daydreaming' can indicate the need to exclude these problems.

Some of the treatments for epilepsy can alter behaviour; e.g. phenobarbitone can cause irritability and difficulty in concentrating.

There are a few rare disorders which can cause children to lose skills which they have acquired, such as a child who has been toilet trained losing control, or loss of language skills. This sort of loss is usually due to acute emotional stress, but if it persists it may be the sign of a neurological problem. The cerebral effects of AIDS can include the gradual loss of skills.

Learning Disorders

There are many different types of learning disabilities, including visual perceptual problems, sequencing problems, and difficulty in following several instructions given at once (this is normal in young children).

Children cannot know that they perceive letters and words differently from other children. All they know is that other children can do something that they cannot, and they tend to believe that it is their fault. This will interfere with self-esteem and the development of peer relationships. They may try to avoid doing work that is so difficult for them by being restless, finding it difficult to stay on task, moving about the room, interrupting others, developing 'symptoms' of headache, or tummy pain.

If they do stay on task, it is likely that even a small amount of work will tire them greatly, causing irritability and loss of ability to 'attend'.

Sometimes a carer can be alerted to perceptual difficulties when a child takes longer than expected to learn or has great difficulty with life tasks such as dressing, and learning right

from left, even after allowing for individual differences in development.

Children who exhibit behaviours as above require their learning and perceptual abilities to be assessed—not their behaviour to be 'managed'.

In the meantime, giving them short tasks and frequent breaks for physical or social activities is likely to improve their learning and behaviour.

Attention Deficit Disorder

ADD is a real disorder which can cause problems such as lack of ability to concentrate, not being able to stay on task, poor short-term memory, and often poor social skills.

Many children with ADD are also 'hyperactive' (called Attention Deficit Disorder with Hyperactivity). They are restless, fidgety, and often disruptive in class; and many may run around a lot. ADD appears to be being over-diagnosed, as many of the 'symptoms' of ADD are normal behaviour in young children, or signs of stress within the environment. On the other hand it is often missed. Anyone working with young children needs to read more about ADD. One book to start with could be Gordon Serfontien's book *The Hidden Handicap*.

One of the things that most helps children with ADD is a 'disciplined' environment, with consistent expectations and routines and few distractions.

Medication, such as 'Ritalin' (methylphenidate) can be very helpful in association with behaviour programs for school-age children with ADD but has much less of a role for children under four.

Assessing health problems

Where children's behaviour changes or there are ongoing behaviour problems without obvious causes, it is important to have a medical assessment to exclude any of the above conditions. The teacher's or carer's observations of the child's behaviour may be very helpful to the assessment. The parents need to give permission for these to be used. If problems continue, parents need to be supported in seeking specialist assessment; e.g. paediatric, neurological, or psychological.

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11
AGGRESSION

'... whenever the child persists stubbornly in obviously unreasonable behaviour, we should look for the persistent stimuli which he can neither ignore nor yet adjust himself to.'
Harry Edhouse

Aggressive behaviour occurs when children are faced with situations with which they cannot cope. A certain amount of aggressive behaviour is normal in the preschool years, as children have to adjust to huge (to them) life changes and have little impulse control or language to help them express feelings and frustration.

Dealing with aggression involves assessing the underlying causes rather than just trying to deal with the symptom.

Strategies which help with aggression, depending on the cause, include:

Dealing with the cause

If possible the underlying cause should be dealt with or at least lessened by the adults as very young children cannot do this for themselves. For example, if it is too stressful for a two-year-old to share toys, he could at first be given shorter periods of communal play, preferably in situations where there are several similar toys. Adults may not be able to prevent stressful events such as divorce, but sometimes can lessen the impact on the children; e.g. by helping the child keep to secure routines, explaining that it is not his fault and perhaps reminding parents, who are caught up in their own needs, of the child's needs for support at this time. Older children can be involved in helping to decide what will best help them to feel safe and to deal with their feelings. Often addressing external causes needs a joint approach from staff and parents ***(see section on parents)***.

Listening

Help the child to talk about his feelings, especially the feeling underlying the anger, such as fear or frustration or disappointment. With very young children the labelling of feelings helps to bring them into the child's control. '*I can see you are feeling very sad and cross but we don't hit*'. An older child needs to have his feelings accepted first and then support in looking at how to express them differently. One teacher and her class made up a book of safe ways to express anger without hurting anyone or breaking anything. A child who was inappropriately expressing anger could then be supported in choosing an idea from the book; e.g. '*I can see you are feeling very angry. What rule have you broken? (If appropriate). What could you do instead? Would you like to choose a way from the book?*'

Holding

(See note at the start of the book on touch)

Children need to be restrained from hurting other children or adults and perhaps to have some quiet time with an adult to help regain control. Punishment such as sending an angry child to be by herself can teach that anger separates people rather than teaching that it can be resolved within relationships. It also can result in further angry behaviour. Some older children can begin to learn the cues for their feelings getting out of control and choose a 'quiet' place or activity which helps them to feel more calm.

With infants and toddlers, holding them often helps them to feel safer and get in control of angry feelings. If a child is really angry it is easiest to hold him against you from behind while sitting down with your arms around him and holding his arms crossed in front of him, one in each of yours. This prevents anyone being hurt but offers the security of body contact which helps to calm the child. The very young can be held on the lap, with arms and legs held firmly. With some older children this is also helpful unless the child is likely to lash out at the teacher. Allowing a child to hit the teacher or carer is inappropriate and can be very frightening for the child, who needs to know that someone is in control.

With some children, holding helps to contain rage. With others, apart from the need for restraint and protection, it may be better for an adult to just stay near the child until her rage has calmed.

Teaching

Children who are aggressive because they don't know any other way require patient teaching of more effective ways to get what they want and to get on with others. This needs to include not only what is not wanted but also some understanding of the effect it has on others and a way to do it differently; e.g. *'Jenny feels sad when you hit her; let's try asking her if you can join the game.'* Older children may be able to think for themselves what they could do differently. Some children often have only one option in their minds about how to deal with a problem before they react aggressively, so they may need help with thinking of other ideas at first.

Any positive changes need to be affirmed

It is important to remember to look for an underlying cause — the meaning of the behaviour. **There is always a reason.** One Year One child who was very aggressive to other children was subjected to investigations for ADD and behaviour modification programs before it was discovered that the aggression began when a new baby arrived in the family. Again it is not possible to remove the cause of the aggression but it is possible to ameliorate the effects on the child. This could include giving him an opportunity to express his feelings and wishes in play such as puppet play, art, and stories about new babies; special responsiblity in the classroom or centre; and by helping the parents if possible to give extra time to the older child while the baby is cared for by someone else.

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12

ISSUES TO DO WITH SETTING BEHAVIOUR-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENTS

'We should be making schools ready for children, not children ready for schools.'
Tonia Godhard, AECA 1994 Triennial conference

Setting the scene

Individual children need to own a special bit of the environment so they feel they belong. It can be a chair or a hook or a locker, a cushion where they sit, or a special place to retreat to.

Before a new child comes to school or preschool, some teachers write them a letter saying how pleased they are that the child is coming and some of the things they will be doing. Even before a child can read the letter, this is helpful. Children love getting letters. Specific feedback throughout the year about new learning or experiences can also be sent in a letter; e.g. how well the child has learned to take turns or join the group or read.

Think about how the children know you care about them—

- Because you are interested in what they say and remember what they told you yesterday.
- Because you share some things about yourself or your dog or your cat—this makes you a real person to whom they can relate.
- Because you have a joke with them.
- Because you smile when you see them. A boy in Year One, when asked to select his favourite teacher, chose one who had never taught him. When asked why, he said, 'Because she always smiles when she meets you in the yard.'
- Because you look as if life caring for them or teaching them is a pleasure and not a burden to you.
- Because you give them a gentle touch or stroke in passing ***(see notes on touch at the start of the book).***
- Because you call them by name, and know the names of family members.
- Because you are never sarcastic and never use put-downs or tease.

If a child comes with a negative reputation, either from home or another centre, you can get in first as she arrives with something positive to say about her, and let her know you are glad to have her.

You can be an advocate for the child in ensuring that staff discussions are not negative and in drawing attention to positive attributes or changes.

Rules

- Let children know clearly what the rules are.
- Let them know that rules are to keep them safe and happy.
- Keep the rules simple and few.

Kindergarten and primary age children can be involved in developing rules, what behaviour they think is OK and what isn't. The teacher can then pull them together, so no-one's suggestion is ignored, into four or five simple rules; e.g. caring for others can include a lot of suggestions.

When the rules are worked out, teach them to the children and to new children who come. Don't expect them just to follow them without teaching time—over and over again!

Children need to feel that the rules are their responsibility as well as the staff's.

Remember that 'showing' is much more valuable than 'telling'.

Environmental problem-solving

Whatever strategies you are using to try to address the individual child's needs, you also need strategies to protect the group and ensure an ongoing safe environment.

- Teachers and carers who spend a lot of time moving about amongst the children have more of a presence and sense of belonging to all than those who stay in one place a lot.
- How a child is placed in groups is very important. Vulnerable children may need to sit near the teacher so that some calming touch, such as stroking or gentle massage of neck and shoulders, can help as the group goes on. Preschoolers may not be ready for the pressure of the group and may need to play in less crowded areas.
- Encourage the children's support for each other; e.g. acknowledge acts of kindness and caring.
- For some activities, a spot on the floor can be marked for each child so they have enough space and cannot reach to pinch or poke. Furniture may need to be arranged to suit.
- Sometimes a place near the teacher helps the child to get attention quickly. A place near the wall with a boundary on one side may give some children a sense of security.
- If trouble is likely to arise, sometimes you can get in first by praising appropriate behaviour.
- A special or important task to do will often help an agitated as well as an anxious child.
- Keep a steady voice so that your anxiety or irritation does not build theirs.
- If you know a child with a problem will settle with TV or a book or music, stop what you are doing and do what will calm them. For many children, heartbeat or dolphin or baroque music is very calming. Any rhythmic activity helps regain control.
- Angry or aggressive children can often be helped by 'stilling' activities, rather than very energetic or exciting ones. Building or painting or relaxation or music can often help. Activities which encourage children to express anger by, for example, hitting a pillow can build anger and tension rather than releasing it, and are not recommended.
- Visualisation is often very effective with children. Think of what you want the visualisation to achieve so that you will choose appropriate words; e.g. to help the children feel more relaxed, or in control, or successful. One idea is for children to lie in a circle so they can't touch each other and the carer or teacher stroke the restless child as she or he does the visualisation with the group.
- Children need to know that it is OK to be angry but that they may not hurt anyone, break anything or hurt themselves. If a child lashes out, he needs to know that, although his feelings may be out of control for him, you are in control. He needs you to be calm, tell him you care for him, tell him you cannot accept what he has done, and take charge of the situation. It is important not to label him (e.g. a bully) and for him to realise that it is the behaviour that is the problem, not the child.
- At the end of a bad day you can say to the children that today was not so good but that you care about them and tomorrow will be better. This will help to prevent children from going home with worries on their minds. Tomorrow you can say again that today will be better and you can acknowledge and reinforce the better, times when they occur.
- Some things have to be stopped for the safety of the child or others.
- Sometimes children need some time away from a particular group or activity. This should always be with an adult, and it should be explained that it is for safety reasons (not punishment). Very disturbed children need extra adult support if possible. Sometimes a staff member can give extra time, sometimes a parent may be able to.

Teachers' and carers' needs

When a child or children have a problem, the additional time and emotional demands can be very stressful on the caregiver.

Sometimes it is important to admit that you need a break. Maybe you can exchange groups with someone else for a short while or get some help from a supervisor.

Sharing and support from colleagues is vital to teaching and learning. Find someone you can talk and share with at the end of the day or when you need to.

What you tell yourself makes a difference. If you say 'Why should I take this terrible behaviour?' you are likely to act in a way that makes it worse. If you say to yourself 'Children don't want to be unhappy and angry, something is going very wrong for this child', you are likely to react quite differently.

Some qualities which are important to working with children with difficulties (and all children):

- being able to respect and believe in the child and yourself;
- being able to remember what it was like to be a child;
- enthusiasm;
- ability to play and have fun;
- warmth;
- flexibility and creativity;
- ability to cope with failure and frustration without losing a sense of hope;
- being willing to learn; and
- empathy and trust.

Some things that you need to bring to problem-solving:

- time;
- a place where you can be private;
- confidentiality;
- listening skills;
- teaching skills;
- problem-solving skills; and
- a willingness to seek help.

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13
WHEN PROBLEMS ARISE

Checking needs

When a particular child seems to be experiencing problems which are not solved by normal strategies, the first step is to keep a record of observation of her behaviour through the use of the checklist below.

Make up a check list and keep it over a week or so as some children's problems occur at different times of the week because of such things as access visits or parents' activities or staff rosters.

Having this information will help in planning for success and will also help when you discuss it with other staff and/or the child's parents. It will help you to know if the problem is based in the centre or class or whether the child seems to be responding to some inner distress.

If other staff are involved with the child, share your ideas about it. A different viewpoint often gives a different point of view.

The following checklist will give you some pointers to begin from.

Checklist for assessing behaviour problems

- Is the behaviour what you would expect for this age?
- Am I expecting too much or too little from this child?
- Am I responding to the child in the most appropriate way?

Gather More Information:

- Make sure you are clear exactly what the behaviour problem is.
- How long has the behaviour been a problem?
- How many times a day does it happen?
- Who is most concerned about the problem?
- When does it occur?
- Who else is involved?
- Where does it occur?
- What happened before the episode?
- What response does the child get?
- How does the child react to this response?

Related Issues: *(See sections on context for behaviour)* e.g.

- Developmental delay/physical impairment: speech, hearing, illness, gross motor, vision.
- Family issues — parent/child relationship, parents' relationship, sibling rivalry, arrival of new baby, step-children.
- Losses (family/friends/pets).
- Transitions — moving house/school/class, changes in routine (unemployment, parents' jobs, hospitalisation — self or family member), staff changes.
- Friendships/social skills.
- Other environmental issues?

What has been tried already?

What helped/didn't help? (If it is not working, do something different, not more of the same.)

When doesn't the problem happen?

Situation/time of day or night/with whom? (You can often link into useful strengths and ideas by finding out when the problem doesn't happen.)

Can you reframe the problem?

Reframing the problem means a way of thinking about the problem that does not seem like a criticism of the child. For example, '*Walter doesn't seem to be ready to join the other children in sitting down for a story yet*', rather than '*Walter is old enough (physically) to conform and he is just trying to get at me.*' Or '*Walter seems to be feeling unsure and needing extra reassurance and attention*', rather than '*That is just attention-seeking behaviour.*' **How you think about the**

problem affects the way you respond to it. Walter is not likely to get his needs for attention met if his problem is defined as just attention-seeking behaviour. He is likely to be ignored. However, if his needs for attention are recognised, he might be shown more appropriate ways to let staff know what he needs; e.g. '*You can always tell me if you need a hug.*' He also needs some extra attention at times when he is behaving appropriately and not asking for attention.

If a child of early school age who feels insecure is telling stories (*that you are absolutely sure are untrue*, because the truth can be really astonishing sometimes) this can be reframed as his talent at story-telling. He can be encouraged to write down and keep his special stories. In this way he is helped to feel special and his 'untrue' stories are re-labelled in a positive way. You can say to the child that it is a 'wish' story and it would be lovely if it were like that. You can tell the child that sometimes when we want someting to happen a lot, we can't make it real but we can make it a lovely story. If a child over five still persists with a story that seems outrageous, there is cause for concern that they can't let go of the story, and the child's whole situation should be looked at.

Very needy infants are very difficult to care for. Sometimes an infant will continually be miserable and reject all offers of relationships made by carers. It is easy to come to the conclusion that the infant is being manipulative; and how you think about the infant's behaviours dictates your attitude to him and how you treat him. The attitude that a distressed infant is being manipulative is never helpful to his development or adjustment. Just to change the way you see him (i.e. as needing something that he is not getting) can make a profound difference to the way you respond to him, and, in the long run, to the infant's adjustment.

Making a plan

Often making a plan to change what is happening can effect lasting results, and it **should always be considered as an option.** Making a plan involves assessment of the child's needs and the needs of the centre or class and then making a plan which changes either

- the environment,
- the equipment,
- the activity,
- the sequence of events, or
- the timing of events.

Example: A child who is feeling very angry because there is a new baby at home, and is hitting younger children.

CHILD'S NEEDS	STAFF GOALS	PLAN
To feel special	To meet child's needs	**Environment:** Designating an area for 'rough' play so other children are protected.
To have feelings understood	To protect other children	**Equipment:** Providing materials for expressions of feelings; e.g. paint, family dolls, puppets.
To express feelings	To manage the program	**Activities:** A child who is having trouble controlling her feelings could have an arrangement with her teacher that when she is feeling stressed she can ask for 'quiet time'. This might be a calming activity; e.g. a special cushion and relaxing music through head-phones. This helps the child learn to take responsibility for her own behaviour.

Without Spanking or Spoiling by Elizabeth Crary has some very useful suggestions for making plans to deal with behaviour problems, including examples.

Guidelines for responding to behaviour

1. **Make contact**

   Go back to the *Relationships First* section. Make sure that your relationship with the child is sound. Then make sure you have the child's full attention while you talk to him. Both body and eye contact if possible. Listen first, then talk.

2. **Set limits**

   Children need safe boundaries, and, no matter how stressed they are, it does not help them to feel that they are out of control. Boundaries should be flexible so they can be adapted to need, but they need to be there. Work out what behaviour is not acceptable for the child's own sake and that of others, and clearly limit it. Such behaviour would include such things as the hitting or biting of staff or children, wild running through congested areas, and the throwing of objects. It may be necessary to avoid situations for a while where these behaviours are likely to occur (e.g. lightly supervised group activities). Involve children in working out limits as they are able.

3. **Keep an observation checklist (See Checking Needs.)**

4. **Assess against the checklist. (See Checklist.)**

5. **Involve parents and other staff in discussion.**

6. **Make a plan to try out.**

7. **Evaluate**

   If it is working stay with it, if not go back to previous steps or get outside help if needed.

8. **Feedback** to the child how she is going, using good news book and observation.

Helping children to maintain behaviour changes

For children to maintain behaviour changes, they need reinforcement of these changes.

- Often the changes are small at first and other children and even staff are more likely to be alert to the negative behaviours than positive changes. The worse the child's behaviour, the better the **noticing skills** needed to notice the positive changes. There was one occasion where a teacher was heard to say to a young boy, '*You're breathing very nicely today, Kevin.*'
- Staff members can help other children to notice positive changes by giving the child encouragement for these in the hearing of the other children; e.g. '*I noticed how you helped Ben with his maths task today, Maria. That was thoughtful.*'
- Staff members can help parents to notice positive changes by giving feedback at pick-up times about some of the positive events of the day. If the child overhears this, it will impact on him as well. Compliments overheard often carry more weight than direct ones to the person. Staff members can help other staff members to notice these changes in the same way.
- **A good news book** where the child's positive achievements are recorded can be a special way of highlighting positive change and seeing the way small changes grow over time. In a good news book something positive is written **every day** by both teachers and parent. It moves between home and school.
- Encouraging or setting up activities with more socially capable peers can also help the child by helping her to feel accepted, by giving her status in the group, and by learning from others.

As far as possible, behaviour should be described positively and the child who is having difficulties taught what is wanted of her, not just what is not wanted. A child who pushes in can be described as wanting a turn and then shown another way to get her needs heard or how to think about other options. For example, '*I can see you want to play, but Judy doesn't like it when you push her.*' You could say,

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'Can I have a turn on the swing soon? You can play with this ball.' Or, if the child is older, *'Judy feels hurt when you push her. What else do you think you could do so you can play too?'*

If there seems to be a sticking point, which often happens to both parents and teachers, it helps to discuss it with another staff member. We can always see better from outside. You may consider getting the support of a consultant for a stuck problem to help get things going. In one child care centre, a joint discussion is sometimes held with staff, parent(s), and a consultant where the child's needs and any underlying causes can be addressed. This can be most successful where there are good relationships between the centre and the home and where the focus is on solving the child's problem, not blaming anyone for the behaviour concern.

All of this sounds as if it takes time; and it does take some thinking and planning time. However, it can be successful, and is more likely to prevent ongoing or increased problems with the child. **In many cases it is surprising how little investment is needed to bring about change.**

N.B. Remember that success often brings a temporary setback, almost like a test to see if things are really better. Teachers and carers need to be ready for this so they won't react in the old ways.

14
WORKING WITH PARENTS

'I will strive to develop positive relationships with families that are based on mutual trust and open communication.'
AECA Code of Ethics

Many parents feel ill at ease with schools and centres because of their own early experiences. Working with parents needs to start before there is a problem, so that problems can be dealt with in the context of a relationship. This is done in different centres in many ways, including:

- having parent coffee mornings, evenings, or breakfasts to share with staff and children;
- having pictures of the family in the centre or classroom;
- celebrating family events at the centre or class;
- asking parents to let staff know what is happening at home in their children's lives;
- sending home newsletters and good news and/or photographs of their child at 'work';
- home visits, as long as these are welcomed by parents;
- asking parents to share their talents with the children;
- encouraging parents to join the parents' committees;
- individual meetings with parents at the begining of the year to learn about each child's individual needs;
- encouraging parents to comment on what is happening in the centre or class, and valuing their suggestions;
- making parents welcome in the centre or class.

Problem-Solving With Parents

We are all vulnerable to what seems like criticism of our children which in an indirect way seems like criticism of us.

Parents are often very concerned to feel that their child is causing some difficulty, and in some cases may become angry with the school centre or staff member, or with the child. In some situations children are punished by their parents in order to get them to 'behave' in the other setting. Therefore, it is most helpful to present the issue to the parents as a situation where the child seems to have a problem (e.g. is very stressed) rather than where the child is presenting a problem for staff (e.g. is misbehaving). There should be no hint that the parent is at fault or of telling parents what they should do.

Sometimes parents seem to want to hear only bad things about their child, to fit with their own image of him. They may seem pleased that the child is misbehaving in another setting, because it makes what is happening at home seem less their fault. In these cases lots of listening, and then working out together some ways to help the child, are important. In this way the parents can own any success, because they have contributed to it. It is important that parents don't feel that they are doing a bad job.

Their contribution to what you both know about the child is very important to any plan, because they know the child best. Any credit for improvement needs to be shared and celebrated. If improvement occurs in the class room or centre, it is because of what is happening at home as well as what is happening in the centre.

The language used is very important. For example, saying '**Your child**...' is more threatening than using the child's name. '**You**' messages can easily make parents feel defensive, and some parents are very sensitive to any hint of blame. For example: '**Sarah** *has always seemed to really enjoy her activities here, but lately she seems to be not so happy and we are not sure what is the matter. Could we get together and share our thoughts about it to see if we can work something out to help her?*' rather than '**Your child** *is not fitting in well with the other children.*'

When the meeting occurs you can say:

- *'Jon has been showing signs of stress over the past two weeks. I'm wondering if you have noticed any changes at home. Or has he said that there is anything about the centre/school that is bothering him?'*
- *'Are there any things about him that you think I should know that would help? For example, have there been any changes lately, such as moving house or anything?'*
- *'If there were some changes, when did they start?'*
- *'You know him best, and I'm wondering if there are any things about how he needs to be managed that would help me. What helps him most?'*
- *'Tell me about Jon's strengths.'*

If you can work out what the child's need is, together you can plan ways to meet that need.

Remember:

- The problem is not the parent's fault nor the child's, nor the school/centre's; the responsibility is to find a solution—not blame.
- You know less about the problem, the family situation, and what is likely to help than the parent does.
- Some people have difficulty accepting progress. Any progress that is made which may be seen to be due to the worker or teacher is further proof that the parent has failed.
- The language you use is important. Parents will hear things in the terms that you use to describe them and react accordingly.
- If you think the problem is part of normal childhood, it will ease worries. However, sometimes it is important for staff to help parents to take situations seriously, and unfair to them and the child to minimise the situation.

Relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island parents

Aboriginal parents need to feel that their culture and values are supported by the centre or school. They may be afraid that the qualities they are fostering at home, such as personal autonomy and community sharing, may be devalued in education and care; and children will be negotiating differences which are often almost in conflict with what they have learned to value at home. This can cause parents to feel defensive and sometimes even in opposition to what they perceive their children to be learning.

- Parents usually believe that children ought to be able to grow strong in their community and home ways rather than have these ways overlaid by another culture. It is important for workers to get to know how behaviour is managed at home so that they can look at where the differences are likely to occur.
- Communication between parents and staff should remain open at all times. This is particularly true if some things happen at home that you cannot support. They need to be acknowledged and talking points developed. You can ask parents about their beliefs about managing behaviour and why they are important, so that you can understand where they are coming from.
- You can ask how you can help support the child in his own cultural ways.
- Parents can be invited to come and watch what is happening in the centre or class and talk about what they see. They may see things that you don't, and another point of view may bring about a more helpful approach.
- Generally Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island parents need to have an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island person to work with; however, this may not be so if teachers and carers take time to build up relationships and show they can be good listeners.
- Shame may be part of the interaction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. It is therefore important to go slowly and build a relationship on positives. Aboriginal workers suggest that Aboriginal parents often expect bad things when talking with teachers—to be told what is wrong rather that what is going well.
- It helps to work with the community. Usually home visits are not advisable, although they could be undertaken with a member of the Aboriginal community after a relationship has been developed. Aboriginal community members too do not always want to be called in just to 'trouble shoot'. Try to build these relationships before there are problems.

15

SOME SUGGESTED RESPONSES TO PARTICULAR BEHAVIOUR PROBLEM ISSUES

1. Out of control feelings

(e.g. temper tantrums, throwing things, biting, physical aggression, destructive behaviour, over-excitement, uncontrolled crying, etc.)

- It is important that the child sees that you are in control and not overcome/scared of/ angered by her out-of-control feelings.
- Remove the child from the situation if appropriate, but stay with her.
- Give permission to have the feelings. '*It is OK to feel disappointed*', etc.
  If the child does not admit the feeling; e.g. says, '*I'm not cross*' or '*I don't care*', give messages that it is all right to have that feeling; e.g. '*Often when people don't win, they feel very disappointed*', or '*I remember when I was at school; one day someone took my book and I was really cross.*'
- Listen to the child.
- Do not permit unsafe behaviour. Set and keep secure boundaries for behaviour.
- Teach appropriate ways to express feelings; e.g. talk about them, draw, water and dough play, etc.
- Stay with the child and, if appropriate, hold him.
- Let him know that you can keep the situation safe and that you will neither let him hurt himself or anyone else, nor will you retaliate.
- Let him know that you care about him.

2. Developmental problems

(e.g. unable to carry out tasks or respond at the same level as peers. Younger behaviour, other behaviour related to stress.)

- The child may be physically bigger than she is able to act, and therefore others' expectations of her may be too high. Expect what she shows she is capable of. Respond to what she is capable of, not age.
- Show how to do what you want in concrete ways.
- Repeat messages as often as necessary.
- Do not give more than one task at a time, break down complex tasks into small parts and give feedback for each part achieved.
- Make sure that you have the child's full attention; use touch, eye contact, and words.
- Give lots of chances to succeed.
- Remember that a child with developmental delay may have other continual stresses.

3. Emotional stress

(e.g. grief , regression, clinging, inability to play, crying, aggression, inattention, inability to do things for self, wetting, etc.)

- Accept that there will be loss of ability to concentrate and take an interest in tasks for a time.
- Reduce expectations for concentration and interest.
- Allow some space, a special place to go for the child to be by himself.
- Listen to the child's feelings and make materials available for expression of them.
- Read appropriate stories.
- Hold, stroke, massage neck and shoulders to help relax ***(see note on touch).***
- Extra nurturing.

4. Regression

(e.g. returning to younger behaviour such as wanting a bottle or dummy, lack of toilet training, clinging, helplessness.)

- Treat the child according to the age she is acting. Even adults who are ill or stressed need to regress and have extra nurturing and assistance which they would not normally need. Children may need to be treated like a younger child for a while (e.g. need help with clothes or feeding). This helps them to feel secure.
- Move slowly forwards as the child is ready.

5. Attention seeking behaviour

(e.g. clinging, whining, excessive showing-off, any behaviour designed to draw attention or reprimand.)

- Remember that attention is the way children perceive love and care.
- A child who is needing but not getting positive attention will act in a way which gets negative attention.
- Give the child positive attention at times when she is not seeking it.
- Help the child to feel special.
- As the child becomes old enough, help her to ask for the attention she needs.
- Sometimes 'flooding' the child with attention until she chooses to move away will help a needy child. If this is chosen, it is important to be aware that it should continue until the child is ready to give it up. A volunteer or grandparent may be able to help in some cases.
- Remember that children need love the most when they deserve it least.

6. Battles for control

(e.g. battles over toilet training, eating, packing things away, etc.)

- Young children usually feel very powerless and need to be given simple choices and control in their lives where possible. Very young children should not have more than two things to choose between.
- If the adult feels he or she must 'win', there is likely to be a battle which engenders resistance, stubbornness, and anger.
- It is especially important not to insist on compliance over areas such as food or toilet training which can cause ongoing problems.
- In some cases, where appropriate, withdrawing resistance will encourage the child to cooperate.
- Sometimes a young child can be distracted or a game made of the request.
- Where something is necessary (e.g. for safety), do not give a choice or get into argument. Give a reason and then insist on compliance.
- Sometimes two positive choices can be given (e.g. *'Would you like to put away the blocks now or after you have a drink?'*)
- Consequences for non-compliance (for over-threes) should be seen as related to the act rather than imposed by the leader or carer (e.g. *'Because the blocks weren't put away there is no time for a walk. That is a pity!'*
- Develop a task roster for older children so it is their turn.
- Help the child to get her started.
- Remember that the aim is to help the child to learn to take appropriate control in her life, not to win a battle.

7. Separation anxiety

(e.g. crying, clinging, inability to play creatively, searching for the parent.)

- Accept the child's feelings and comfort her. Do not distract too quickly. For example, say, *'You are feeling very sad because Daddy has gone to work. He'll be back after your sleep'.*
- Make it a priority to help child to relate to a staff person.
- Young children need to be given into the personal care of a staff member when the parent leaves. This includes very anxious school beginners, although sometimes an older child can support them. It is important that it doesn't become a burden for the other child.
- Giving the child a special task on arrival often helps.
- Allow the child to have her transition object (comforter).

- Allow the child to 'mind' something that belongs to the parent (e.g. car keys).
- Encourage the parent to stay until the child is secure, if possible. This may take several weeks.
- When starting, if the child does not settle, it can help if the parent and child stay for an hour or so each day and then leave together.
- If the parent has to leave, it is best to do it confidently. It makes a child more anxious if the parent asks the child repeatedly, '*Can I go now?*'
- It often helps if the child leaves the parent, rather than the other way round; e.g. the child leaves the parent at home and someone else takes her to kindy or care or school.
- Read simple stories about separation.
- For the very young, play *Come and Go* and *Hide and Seek* games.
- Older children may be helped by being given some control over the situation; e.g. who brings them to school, where they say goodbye, etc.
- Parents must be encouraged to be very reliable about picking up children on time.
- The child needs to have her fears accepted as real, but not to think that the adults are worried as well. Make sure she does not overhear conversations about her difficulties.
- If there has been a relationship break-up and a parent has left, a child may need reassurance that the other parent will not leave.

Sometimes children need the same kind of reassurance if the parents of a friend have separated. This is usually a task for the parent, but a teacher/carer can suggest it for consideration as an option if a child is anxious about going to school or preschool.

- If parents or staff become impatient or irritated by the child's anxiety, it is likely to make it worse.
- Encourage children to develop friendships.
- There is a commonly-held belief that separation anxiety is the mother's anxiety, not the child's. Although this may be so in a small number of cases, in general this belief is not helpful in dealing with the child's anxiety. Separation anxiety can occur from many reasons, including earlier forced separations due to illness, moving house, parental illness or arguments, etc.
- If the problem is ongoing, it may be advisable to postpone the separation (e.g. starting preschool until the child is a little older), if this is possible.

16
TALKING TO CHILDREN WHEN THERE IS A PROBLEM

'I will ensure that my work with children is based on their interests and needs and let them know they have a contribution to make.'
AECA Code of Ethics

Sometimes it is difficult to talk to children or get them to talk to you.

- With very young children play is one of the best ways of communication.
- Undirected playing with dolls who can represent people can often help to understand what is worrying the child.
- Puppets can also be useful to start conversation and can represent all sorts of people in the child's life. You can use the puppets to make up a story about a hypothetical child, and consult the child about how the child in the story (puppet) might be feeling or what should happen next.
- In talking with children it is important to reassure them, not once but many times, that they are safe and cared for, whatever is going wrong for them at the moment. It is also important that the child understands that, although her behaviour may need to change, she is valued and cared for.
- With older children you can say things like '*Sometimes people have worries that are hard to talk about but there isn't anything so bad that you can't tell someone*', or '*Sometimes children feel very sad, disappointed, scared when…*', or '*You know there are times when you can feel sad and happy at the same time. Do you ever feel like that?*', or '*Once when I was at school I felt …*'
- If the child does not wish to talk, it is often helpful to give him permission to be silent and talk only when he is ready. For example, one three-year-old boy in preschool had been refusing to speak for several months in spite of much cajoling. The preschool director made it clear to staff and children that the boy would talk when he was ready and that he was not to be pressured. He was included in all activities but not asked to talk. One day only two weeks later, the director was standing at the bottom of the slide when a loud voice which she had not heard before commanded, 'Catch me, Mrs Potter!' Ben had decided to talk and from then on he joined in, in the same way as the other children. (N.B. Elective mutism (refusal to talk) is sometimes associated with child abuse".)
- Questions such as 'Why did you do that?' are usually unhelpful because they put the child on the defensive and get an answer of 'I don't know.' The child usually doesn't know why he did it.
- For children who find it difficult to talk, playing a game with them often helps to relax them (e.g. *Lotto* or any other simple game), or you can supply a toy such as a teddy and ask the child to tell you a story about it. For an older child, any board game or a jigsaw can be used.
- It is important that the child feels that you have time and are not rushing somewhere, and that there is privacy.
- Reading appropriate stories to the child which accept both positive and negative feelings can open up communication. Older children can talk about what else could be done and perhaps role-play different approaches to the situation.

17
FINAL CHECKLIST

Is my relationship with this child OK? If not, what is getting in the way?

- What do I need to do to work out the cause of the inappropriate behaviour? ***(Check List)***.
- Is there any planning I can put into place which will help?
- What can I change about the classroom environment?
- Have I talked with and listened to the child?
- Have I talked to the parents?

When I have the above information, I can look at

— what my goal is with this child;
— what steps I can take to achieve it;
— what I will look for to know that I have achieved it;
— what feedback I will give to the child, the parents, and myself as we achieve parts of the goal; and
— what message the child will take with her from my intervention. What will it mean to her?

Interventions with children should:

— instil in them a sense of their own power and capability;
— help them to develop skills in solving their problems;
— be positive; and
— be fun.

Most important—What is the child's take-home message about him/herself?

When to refer on

Some children, even with the best help that you can offer, will need more assistance to be able to cope with what is troubling them and move forward. The following are situations when referral to a counsellor should be considered.

- When the child's inappropriate behaviour or distress continues over a period (e.g. more than a few weeks) in spite of all efforts to help and without showing gradual improvement.
- Inability to play creatively over a period. Continuous repetitive manipulation of equipment or self-comforting behaviour without creative play.
- When the child's problem continually interferes with his ability to learn and/or to relate socially to other children (appropriately for his age).
- Continuing self-harm or lack of response to pain or hurt.
- When there are serious home or family problems which are outside your role to deal with.
- All cases of suspected child abuse or neglect should be reported.

Making referrals

Making successful referrals is one of the most difficult things that workers have to do. It is not so difficult when it is the parent's idea or a parent asks you for help, but often teachers and carers need to instigate the referral.

The following may be helpful:

- It is always the parent's choice (except in cases of abuse where child protection laws require notification).
- Discuss the referral as an option or experiment which can be tried.
- Outline possible options.
- Present it as a way of caring to parent. For example, '*Sam seems to be needing extra support with managing his feelings at the moment. What we've been trying doesn't seem to be working, and I'm wondering how you would feel about getting an opinion from someone right outside the situation. I've found in the past that it often helps a child a lot to get a bit of help while they are young rather than wait until later when maybe things are more difficult.*'
- If you think the parent needs it, offer to make the initial contact.
- Ask the parents to let you know how they got on and if it was helpful, so that they feel able to tell you if it did not work out.

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FURTHER READING

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Behaviour Management in context. '...A very good place to start' Magarey Institute, Child and Youth Health, South Australia.

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